Collaborative Reform and Other Improbable Dreams

THE CHALLENGES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOLS

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CHAPTER 13

A PDS Network of Teachers: The Case of Art

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This chapter describes a PDS that networks K–12 art educators from four very different school districts. The focus is Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE), an approach to art education that extends the focus of art lessons from expressive activities to a study of historical and interpretive aspects of art and argues for the importance of art in the school curriculum. The PDS also overlaps with a large national grant that intends to integrate art into the wider school curriculum and life of the school. Because the Art Education Department is in the College of Fine Arts rather than Education, it presents an interesting case of collaboration both across colleges at the university and with the schools.

In all education projects, context matters. Certainly, the context has greatly influenced the development of our PDS for art teachers, code-named ART (Art Research and Teaching). For one thing, at OSU the Department of Art Education, which has responsibility for preservice and inservice programs for art teachers, is not in the College of Education. It is in the College of the Arts. This situation is not uncommon and it has advantages and disadvantages. It allies us more with our subject-matter colleagues and it distances us a little from our education colleagues. In this respect, it exaggerates the typical situation of art teachers in the public schools, where they tend to feel somewhat distant from other teachers. They often feel that they teach a subject that others don't understand well, that cultivates qualities and abilities in students that are not appreciated sufficiently by other teachers, and that has an insecure

place in the curriculum. In addition, there is only one art teacher in most schools, except large high schools, and at the elementary level in Ohio many art teachers have to teach in more than one school. Consequently there may be a sense of isolation within the school. In these circumstances, professional connections with other art teachers often become more important to them than connections with other teachers at their own school. No doubt all teachers experience the pull of these two kinds of affiliations: subject-matter ones and within-school ones. Art teachers (of course there are exceptions) tend to experience the first as more important than the second.

For these kinds of reasons, it seemed to us from the beginning that art required a PDS that is structured as a network of art teachers rather than a single site. Logistics alone pointed that way. When ART was first planned (ART was one of the first PDSs at OSU to be planned), the Art Education Department at OSU graduated an average of about 30 art teachers each year (the number has since declined a bit with the move of the program to the graduate level). Certification to teach art in Ohio is K–12 and so we needed an average of 30 elementary and 30 secondary placements each year for student teachers. That meant that we needed at least 60 cooperating art teachers actively engaged each year in the PDS, which in turn meant almost 60 different schools. At the beginning, there was considerable discussion about the logic of the network idea. It was not the standard model of PDSs in the literature and we could find little precedent. But it seemed inevitable. And we could quote the university's graduate school as a similar use of the word "school" to mean more than "site." Also, it was clear that other subject-matter specialists were in the same position. Those in physical education were particularly active at OSU at the time and we took comfort from them.

Two of the department's faculty were normally assigned to work with the field experience aspects of the certification program and one of these (Marjorie Schiller), together with the then chairperson (Michael Parsons), held a series of meetings with local teachers. The idea was, they argued, to establish a more collaborative arrangement between the teachers and the department. The purposes of the collaboration were to be three: preservice education, inservice learning, research. There was to be frequent communication, group decision-making, experimental attitudes, sharing of power and responsibilities. We had little difficulty recruiting teachers. Art teachers are typically dedicated professionals, they look for professional connections, and the department has long had good relations with many local teachers.

But from the beginning we noticed the tension inherent in the network-of-individual-teachers idea, the tension between viewing the teacher as an independent subject-matter specialist and as a school fac-

ulty member. Thought of the first way, the art teacher was an independent professional individually contracting to join the PDS. Certainly, that is how we talked about it. At the same time, for a variety of reasons, they needed support from within their school (or schools), from other teachers and especially from the principal. The most obvious of these reasons was the need to free up some teacher time to attend meetings for a variety of ART-related purposes. The principal was the one who could make this happen, together with the district's policies that lay behind the principal. So in practice, the network was also a network of schools and districts, although we did not like to dwell on this. We adopted two kinds of criteria for selecting teachers who wanted to join ART. One set applied to individuals, the other to the school and the school district in which they worked. The individual ones included the following:

- Successful experience in teaching art in public schools.
- Educational philosophy congruent with that of the department.
- Desire to work collaboratively with colleagues and the university.
- Willingness to work with student teachers.
- Flexible attitudes regarding curriculum and instructional issues.

The institutional ones were:

- Teaches in a school where the principal is supportive of art in the curriculum.
- Teaches in a district that is willing to spend resources on the professional development of art teachers.

There are close to 20 school districts in Franklin County but the department had particularly good relations with four of them, two of them urban and two suburban. So we organized ART with teachers from only those four districts. Each district signed an agreement with the department establishing the PDS and agreeing to provide appropriate resources for teachers.

We created an advisory committee for ART that consisted of representatives of the four school districts (and of the department) and we used the districts as a structure for organizing a variety of activities. For example, we rotated student teachers to a different district each quarter and had meetings about supervision issues with the art teachers from that district each quarter. This proved popular with teachers because it gave them a voice about supervision issues and it also served as an opportunity for them to discuss districtwide issues affecting art education.

So we organized a network of individual art teachers who volunteered to work together for common purposes, within a structure that included school districts and gave them representation on an advisory committee. Moreover, we actively solicited the support of school principals and invited them to professional development activities. This duality has continued to manifest itself throughout the history of ART. And as suggested above, there is a parallel at the university. We thought of ourselves as acting independently of our colleagues in the College of Education and much of the time we did so. But we also gained considerable support from them, both intellectually and organizationally. We were, after all, part of the university's PDS initiative, sparked by the Holmes Group and its publications. There was an administrative policy-making structure that supervised all of the PDSs, to which we reported. And the College of Education gave us a regular petty cash fund, which paid for things like teacher lunches and coffees at meetings.

INITIAL STEPS

One of our early steps was to hire a clinical educator, as the other PDSs did. The clinical educator was to be an experienced art teacher, released half-time from one of the schools. The primary duty was to share the work of communication and problem-solving with Marjorie Schiller.

We advertised this position in the school districts and the ART advisory board chose Elizabeth Katz, an experienced art teacher in a middle school in the Whitehall City School District. She turned out to be an excellent choice for the position, able to work effectively with local teachers, with students and with university faculty.

Another early step was to reorganize some of the arrangements for student teaching. We held meetings with art teachers, sometimes within districts and sometimes across districts, to discuss items such as student placements, expectations of student teachers, evaluations of student teaching, schedule of supervisory visits, the weekly seminar meetings. Wherever possible, decisions were made jointly. For example, specific criteria for evaluating student teachers were arrived at jointly at the beginning of each quarter with the teachers from each district, and so was the allocation of responsibility for this evaluation between the cooperating teacher, the supervising university person (who was usually a graduate student), and the university faculty member. The evaluation of student teachers had in the past sometimes been a subject of misunderstandings between school and university people, in spite of efforts to put the department's expectations in writing, and the topic had occasionally led to inefficiencies. Our experience was that joint decision-

making about how evaluation was to be done and which criteria were to be used did much to make the evaluation of student teaching run more smoothly. The same thing could be said about student placements and the schedule of supervisory visits. These were decided in a collaborative way, as a result of group discussions, and the level of mutual understanding was greatly enhanced. There were fewer problems in the system, and problem-solving, as for example when a student's placement might need to be changed, became much easier.

We also reorganized the weekly seminar that traditionally accompanied student teaching. This had been run on lines very like a regular class at the university, by the faculty member responsible for student teaching. We experimented with designing the seminar at the beginning of the quarter with the art teachers of the district in which student teaching was going to occur. We reached common agreement on the important topics for the students to discuss and the seminar became almost a group responsibility. A number of teachers volunteered each to lead the seminar one evening and to host it at their school. In this way, it rotated between schools. This provided an additional motivation for some teachers to attend, for they would be able to see colleagues' classrooms. The arrangement also allowed students to visit a number of different schools. The curriculum dealt with a number of topics, such as classroom discipline or curriculum, but teachers also treated it as an opportunity to explain their own situation and approach.

CURRICULUM CHANGE

Another contextual factor that influenced ART was the presence within the department of a long-term effort to change the art curriculum in schools throughout Ohio. This effort was funded in part by an annual grant from the Getty Institute for Art Education and was channeled through an organization called the Ohio Partnership for the Visual Arts (OPVA), also a collaborative enterprise between school districts in Ohio and the department. The traditional curriculum in art in the United States has been oriented toward the creative expression of children, through having them make art. The purpose of the OPVA was to help teachers move from an expressive curriculum to one oriented toward understanding and interpreting artworks, including adult works, both contemporary and traditional, as well as the children's own works. The department has long been identified nationally as a champion of the view that the purpose of art education is understanding rather than expression and it has held many curriculum inservice institutes and workshops for teachers across Ohio. The Getty Institute called the cur-

riculum movement Discipline-Based Art Education. The Ohio State Department of Education has now embodied it in its guidelines under the title Comprehensive Art Education.

It was natural, given the importance of this curriculum issue, that it should affect the Art PDS from the beginning. One way in which this happened was mentioned above: it meant that the teacher should be in favor of Comprehensive Art Education. We felt that because our teacher preparation program prepared students to teach such a curriculum, we wanted them to do their student teaching in a classroom where it could be found.

Another way in which the OPVA affected ART was through the inservice workshops on curriculum issues that it regularly offered for teachers across Ohio, including in Franklin County. Many of these workshops were funded by the Getty Institute. In Franklin County, the teachers who volunteered to join ART also tended to participate in these inservice activities. This made it easy for us to tailor some of these opportunities to the particular needs identified by the ART teachers. For example, many of them wanted more knowledge of the art of contemporary minority and women artists. Others wanted discussion of methods of teaching art criticism to children. And so we organized several one-day workshops on these topics primarily for, but not limited to, the teachers in ART. We also required our student teachers to attend some of these inservice activities.

In short, the presence of OPVA in the department meant that ART had an unusually strong orientation toward curriculum development and probably included more professional development activities than would otherwise have been the case. At times, indeed, with respect to professional development, their activities overlapped almost completely. There were important differences, however. ART was also concerned with instructional and supervisory issues and in that way it stretched beyond the official concerns of OPVA. OPVA in turn was involved with schools across the entire state and in that way included much more than the teachers in Franklin County. It was not uncommon for teachers to be unclear which activities belonged to which.

ART AND THE REST OF THE CURRICULUM

Part of the goal of the DBAE movement was to mainstream art within the school. It did this in part by making it clear that art was a subject comparable to others in the curriculum, equally demanding and equally worthwhile. For these reasons, it was argued that art should stand as an equal beside other school subjects and have equal curriculum space and

resources. A somewhat different argument was that art connected unusually well with other school subjects. Understanding an artwork requires understanding its subject matter in the context of the culture of its production. For example, if an artist makes an artwork about ecological concerns (an important contemporary theme), understanding it will require some sense of the ecological issues that the artist addressed. This may mean an understanding of biological, chemical, economic, political, historical, issues (to the degree that they affect the artwork) and consequently the potential overlap with the rest of the school curriculum is extensive. The point is quite general: art is related to and encapsulates culture. So understanding it requires not only the language arts—talking, reading, writing, about artworks—but also, potentially, the study of any school subject.

Note that on the traditional view there was very little such overlap, because teachers aimed mostly at promoting children's expressive abilities through making art. On that view, art required quite different skills or qualities—expressive, creative, visual—from those required by the rest of the curriculum—linear, logical, verbal. It was this view that created the sense that art was different in school.

Because of the overlap argument, we had been trying for some time to involve all kinds of teachers and other school personnel in our professional development activities about comprehensive art curriculum. The idea was that if one wanted children to learn to study artworks, to read and write about them and understand their social reference, then the art program needed support from the whole school. Children could write about an artwork as part of language arts and study its social references in social studies classes. Groups of teachers could get together and plan to work with their students on particular works, artists, themes. For these reasons we had encouraged teams of teachers to attend our workshops along with the art teacher.

We had had sporadic success with this. There were schools, especially at the elementary level, where a group of teachers planned together to teach art through the curriculum. Sometimes the effect was very visible in the corridors and throughout the school building. This was almost always where the principal was a strong supporter of the arts. The most notable case was probably Gables Elementary, where the principal (Don Cramer) was very supportive, the art teacher (Brigid Moriarty) was very strong, and many of the teachers had attended our workshops.

An interesting feature of Gables was that it also participated in one of the other PDS structures, the ECC, which was a group of elementary schools working together. This situation provided a rich set of possibilities that we never quite took advantage of. For example, we placed an

art student teacher every year with the art teacher in Gables but we never assigned one with a regular classroom teacher. At a slightly more systematic level, the fact that Gables was a part of two PDSs suggested greater collaboration between the PDSs, with respect to both student teaching and to professional development activities. We had good informal relations with the ECC PDS and had conversations along these lines. But nothing formal came of this. Shortage of time and the formal structures of both the university and the school proved too much to overcome.

FOUR YEARS LATER

This discussion takes us four years into ART. It took two years of discussions and planning to initiate it and for two years it has operated with some success. Its principal successes have been with student teaching and with professional development activities. With student teaching, it has improved communications, engaged teachers more fully in the process, and relieved many of the problems that arose at times in the previous system. It did not succeed in changing other aspects of the teacher preparation program, though with more time that might still occur. The context of change at the university, and its traditional reward system for faculty, have been such that it has been hard so far to pay serious attention to suggestions from the field for further changes to the certification program.

With respect to professional development, ART has been quite successful in organizing curriculum-oriented activities collaboratively, both short ones during the year and longer ones during the summer. It has also brought art teachers together, especially within districts, in ways that promoted mutual support and understanding. Through the student teacher seminar, it also raised instructional issues among teachers, though the discussions were more limited than we would have hoped.

Like the other PDSs, we announced that collaborative research was a goal of ART. Changes in the certification program itself required that the student teachers engage in action research. But so far, the imperatives of program needs and the shortage of time have meant that this goal has had low priority and there has been little research planned and accomplished within ART. It is of course possible that this is still to come, since ART is only two years into full operation.

This brings the story up to the point of writing. And here again the particularities of context play a hand in the story. It happens that several key personnel changes are occurring all at the same time. The clinical educator is changing at the end of a two-year cycle, as was planned.

The department chairperson is stepping out of the chair and going on a sabbatical leave. And Marjorie Schiller, who has had primary responsibility for student teaching and is the one who knows all of the relevant people, is leaving the university for another position.

The structure of ART is still in place and we hope it will grow and prosper. But the structure of ART does not penetrate deep within either the department or the schools. Within the schools, it is primarily dependent on the good will and energies of individual teachers and principals, with few claims on the hard resources of teacher time and funds. Within the department, it is a primarily a way to organize student teaching, which is an aspect of teacher preparation, which is one of the department's programs. It is not clear that the university's reward system supports the structure of ART or that it has been sufficiently connected to research activities to attract widespread support from faculty.

In short we are optimistic for the future of ART but aware of the fragility of collaborative enterprises that cross institutional boundaries without changing them. In this respect, ART is no different from other PDSs and it will be the extraneous features of the context that will decide the future.